



TESTIMONY CONCERNING

Senate Bill No. 1095: AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS

**March 1, 2023
Education Committee**

Chairman Currey and Chairman McCrory, Representative McCarty, Representative Bethel, and other members of the Education Committee:

The Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA), affiliated with the University of Connecticut School of Law, is the largest children's legal rights organization in New England. Our mission is to promote and protect the legal rights and interests of Connecticut's most vulnerable children and young adults who are dependent upon the judicial, child welfare, health, education, and juvenile justice systems. CCA provides holistic legal services to these young people through individual representation, systemic advocacy, education, and training.

The Center for Children's Advocacy fully supports S.B. 1095: An Act Concerning School Resource Officers, as this bill will increase transparency surrounding School Resource Officers (SROs).

S.B. 1095 Will Create Transparency Around the Role of SROs by requiring that School-Police Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) are Public and Readily Accessible

In 2015, the legislature passed an act requiring signed MOUs between police and school districts in towns and cities with SROs stationed in their schools.¹ The purpose behind the MOU was to define the role of police officers in school setting in accordance with a graduated response protocol. Despite the passage of this legislation, MOUs are still not readily accessible to this day. To remedy that, S.B.1095 will require towns with police in their schools to make these MOUs public so there will be no question about their content, or if they have even been created.

In many school districts, the role of police officers in schools is not clearly defined. In addition, it is an established reality that schools with SROs have more arrests and more expulsions than schools without SROs.² By requiring school districts to make MOUs public, S.B. 1095 will create transparency as to the role of police officers in schools. By shining this light on MOUs,

¹ [Public Act 15-168](#), An Act Concerning Collaboration Between Boards of Education and School Resource Officers and the Collection and Reporting of Data on School-Based Arrests.

² Adelaie, Samaila, Lauren, Ruth, Connecticut Voices for Children, Protecting or Pushing Out: The Prevalence and Impact of School Resource Officers in Connecticut, December 2021, pp. 11-12.

schools with SROs will be more apt to keep their MOUs current and accessible to members of the local community. Transparency is good for students, officers, and school administration: students will not have to fear being arrested at school; SROs will not be expected to fulfill duties that they are not trained for; and school administration will be able to make their purposes for having police officers in their schools clear.

Having all of this information readily accessible will ensure that the police in our schools are focused on promoting a safe school climate, protecting our children, and responding to emergency situations, rather than punishing students unnecessarily.

S.B. 1095 Will Ensure That SROs Do Not Get Unnecessarily Involved In Crises For Which Other School Staff Are Better Trained

All too often, SROs become involved in lower levels of school discipline, many times at the urging of teachers or administration. This involvement can be unnecessary and unwarranted, leading to negative outcomes for students.³ S.B. 1095 requires that the role of the SRO be clarified and limited while at the same time reinforces role of appropriately trained staff in handling crises in the school setting.

Consider, for example, our client Arielle. Arielle was a high-school student with an emotional disability who had experienced two significant losses in a short period of time. Triggered by a classmate who mocked one of these losses, she walked out of her classroom to look for a trusted staff person and to attempt to go a room in the building where she often went to process through challenges as a part of her behavior plan. Instead, she encountered her school's SRO who was not part of her Planning and Placement Team (PPT) or aware of her Individual Education Plan (IEP), and therefore, not aware of the details of her disability or the behavior plan in place for her. The SRO just saw an agitated student rushing to leave. She ended up in a negative exchange with the officer and running to escape the building. As a result, she was ultimately restrained and arrested. Given the situation, the juvenile court dismissed her case. Had Arielle been directed to a counselor or other support staff, this incident and the related traumatic arrest, likely would have never occurred. It is incidents like these that S.B. 1095 seeks to prevent by ensuring the role of SROs versus counseling related support staff will be clearly defined for, in and by schools.

S.B. 1095 Will Help Reduce School Based Arrests That Disproportionately Impact Students of Color and Students With Disabilities.

By creating provisions to clearly define the role of an SRO, and by enhancing transparency around the MOUs required between schools and police, S.B. 1095 will also help to prevent

³ Too many of our youth are arrested in school, resulting in a school-to-prison pipeline. Students in schools with SROs are over three times more likely to be arrested than students in schools without SROs. In addition, most school-based arrests are for non-violent offenses, such as disruptive behavior, which means many students are entering the juvenile justice system as a result of being arrested for minor offenses in school. In one survey of School Resource Officers, 77% percent reported that they had arrested a student simply to calm them down and 55% reported arrested students for minor offenses just because the teacher wanted the student to be arrested. *Chelsea Connery*, University of Connecticut Neag School of Education, *The Prevalence and the Price of Police in Schools*, October 2020, p. 7.

unnecessary arrests of the groups of students that are disproportionately impacted by the presence of police officers in schools. The vast majority of youth being arrested in school are students of color. During the 2018-2019 school year, Black students made up 25 percent of all arrests and Latino/a/x students made up 39 percent of all arrests,⁴ even though these groups made up only 13 percent and 26 percent of the student population respectively.⁵ Likewise, students with disabilities make up a disproportionate number of students arrested in schools. During the 2017-2018 school year, despite making up only 14.5% of all students in the state, in more than two dozen high schools, students with disabilities made up nearly half of the referrals to police for in-school.⁶

For these reasons, the Center for Children's Advocacy supports the passage of S.B. 1095 and urges the legislature to take even more steps to create more transparency around School Resource Officers and alternatives to having police officers in schools. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

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⁴ The Connecticut State Board of Education 2020-2021 Report on Student Discipline in Connecticut Public Schools is available at: https://edsight.ct.gov/relatedreports/2020_2021_Report_on_Student_Discipline_in_Connecticut_Public_Schools.pdf.

⁵ <https://public-edsight.ct.gov>.

⁶ Mitchell, Corey Yeradri, Joe & Ferriss, Susan Center for Public Integrity, When Schools Call Police on Kids, September 2021.